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EAST GERMANY: THE BIERMANN AFFAIR

ANNCR:

EAST GERMANY'S EXPULSION OF THE WELL-KNOWN POET-SINGER WOLF BIERMANN HAS LED TO A PROTEST MOVEMENT BY EAST GERMAN INTELLECTUALS UNUSUAL FOR A COMMUNIST COUNTRY. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT LOOKS AT SOME ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION:

VOICE:

WOLF BIERMANN IS A WRITER AND SINGER OF CHANSONS, MANY OF THEM POLITICAL AND CRITICAL OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN EAST GERMANY. BUT HE IS A CONCERNED COMMUNIST WHO LOVES HIS COUNTRY AND WANTS EAST GERMANY TO DEVELOP A TRULY SOCIALIST SOCIETY QUITE DIFFERENT, HE SAYS, FROM THE EXISTING POLITICAL SYSTEM.

FOR YEARS BIERMANN, WHO HAS OFTEN BEEN CALLED A COMMUNIST COUNTERCULTURE FOLK SINGER, HAS BEEN FORBIDDEN TO PERFORM IN PUBLIC IN EAST GERMANY. SEVERAL WEEKS AGO HE ACCEPTED AN INVITATION TO TOUR WEST GERMANY, WHEREUPON THE EAST GERMAN GOVERNMENT DENOUNCED HIM AS TRAITOR, REFUSED HIM PERMISSION TO RETURN TO HIS WIFE AND SMALL CHILD IN EAST GERMANY AND REVOKED HIS CITIZENSHIP.

IT'S GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT THE AUTHORITIES LET WOLF BIERMANN GO TO WEST GERMANY IN ORDER TO GET RID OF HIM. APPARENTLY THEY BELIEVED THAT APART FROM SOME OUTCRY IN THE WEST VERY LITTLE WOULD HAPPEN....IN EAST GERMANY, THAT IS. BUT THEY WERE VERY MUCH MISTAKEN. A NUMBER OF PROMINENT EAST GERMAN WRITERS AND ARTISTS, AS WELL AS OTHER INTELLECTUALS, PUBLICLY PROTESTED BIERMANN'S EXPATRIATION.

AT THE SAME TIME, AN ATTEMPT BY THE PARTY LEADERSHIP TO ASSEMBLE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ITS ACTION THROUGH STATEMENTS AND LETTERS TO EAST GERMAN NEWSPAPERS HAS HAD A LUKEWARM RESPONSE. AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS THE EAST GERMAN REGIME HAS BEEN UNABLE TO HIDE FROM THE PUBLIC CRITICISM OF IT'S POLICIES, THIS TIME FROM AN INTELLECTUAL ELITE WHICH HAS THE COURAGE TO SPEAK OUT AND TO DEMAND MORE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.

THE FACT THAT WEST GERMAN TELEVISION CAN BE RECEIVED EASILY IN EAST GERMANY MEANT THAT THE EAST GERMANY POPULATION COULD HEAR ON TWO EVENINGS, DURING SIX HOURS OF PROGRAMS, A PERFORMANCE BY WOLF BIERMANN, WHO IN HIS SONGS SHARPLY CRITICIZED AND RIDICULED THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IN EAST GERMANY. ON THE SAME TELEVISION PROGRAMS THE EAST GERMANS LEARNED THAT THE ACTION OF ITS GOVERNMENT WAS STRONGLY CONDEMNED NOT ONLY BY LEFT-WING SPOKESMEN IN WEST GERMANY, INCLUDING THE COMMUNISTS, BUT ALSO BY THE COMMUNIST PARTIES IN ITALY AND FRANCE. IN SHORT, WHAT WAS INTENDED AS A WARNING FOR ITS RESTLESS INTELLECTUALS HAS BACKFIRED INTO WIDESPREAD CONDEMNATION OF THE HONECKER-REGIME.

SOME CRITICS HAVE SEEN A CERTAIN PARALLEL BETWEEN THE BIERMANN CASE AND THAT OF ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN. BUT ALTHOUGH BOTH WERE EXPELLED FROM THEIR NATIVE COUNTRIES, THERE IS A MAJOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO MEN. BIERMANN IS A COMMUNIST. HE WANTS TO RETURN TO EAST GERMANY AND LIVE THERE, AND FIGHT THERE FOR A SOCIALIST SOCIETY. HE WANTS EAST GERMANY TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTIES IN FRANCE, ITALY AND SPAIN AND ACHIEVE WHAT HE CALLS GENUINE "SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY." HE REJECTS THE PARTY

HIERARCHY IN EAST GERMANY, NOT THE EAST GERMAN STATE AND COMMUNISM. HE WANTS TO SEE A COMMUNIST OPPOSITION DEVELOP AGAINST THE PRESENT REGIME. AND HE BELIEVES THAT WITH HIS SONGS HE CAN HELP THOSE IN HIS HOMELAND WHO ARE WORKING FOR A SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY.

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